



LOGGERHEADLINES

Sea Turtle News from South Carolina

June - July, 2005

Greetings!

It has been a lively and busy two months with good news on strandings, good news with nesting, but a “mixed bag” with hatching as you will see in this issue of *Loggerheadlines*.

Strandings

June strandings were close to the previous two years. There were a total of 37 compared to 39 last year and 32 in 2003. There were 28 loggerheads, two green turtles, six Kemp's ridleys and one unidentified.

The 17 July strandings were the lowest since 1993. There were 15 loggerheads, one Kemp's ridley and one unidentified. However, with a total to date of 81, this is about 20% below the 10-year average. Although fewer than in previous years, debilitated turtles continued to strand, especially along the northern coast.

One of the strangest strandings washed ashore 2 June on Kiawah Island. A picture is worth a thousand words.



Photo by **Art Zackrison**

Necropsy Summary

Post-mortems were performed on six sea turtles in June and July, five loggerheads and one Kemp's ridley. All were immature and died from chronic causes. Four of these had been treated at the SC Aquarium. One had a hook that had perforated the esophagus and trachea and the other three were classic examples of Debilitated Turtle Syndrome (DTS).

Rehabilitation at the SC Aquarium

Five loggerheads were admitted to the sea turtle hospital at the South Carolina Aquarium in June and two in July. The case from North Myrtle Beach with a hook in the esophagus is written up in more detail on page four. One “floater” from Surfside Beach is still being treated. All others were diagnosed with DTS. One will be released on August 19th, but the others died despite aggressive treatment, including blood transfusions. We will continue to treat DTS turtles to learn more about this condition. – **Kelly Thorvalson, Aquarist**

Regional Update

Federal Activities

As of mid-July, over 10,000 Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests have been counted at seven camps in Tamaulipas and Veracruz, Mexico. A total of 7,147 nests for the entire nesting season was documented in 2004. The number of Kemp's nests laid in Texas this year remains at 51. Other Kemp's ridley nesting has been documented in the United States: two in Florida, one in Georgia and one suspected nest in Alabama. – **Sandy MacPherson, National Sea Turtle Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

North Carolina

Matthew Godfrey, State Coordinator for the North Carolina Wildlife Commission, reports they have just over 560 nests this year. At this pace, the grand total for 2005 should be close to the mean of 750 nests for the state. The majority of nests have been laid by loggerheads, while eight leatherback and seven green nests have also been observed.

There have been 249 observed strandings to date. The majority have been large juvenile loggerheads, occurring both on inshore and ocean shorelines. In the near future, NMFS is expected to issue a decision on a recent request by NC Division of Marine Fisheries for up to 100 lethal and over 300 non-lethal takes of sea turtles by the flounder gillnet fishery in Pamlico Sound. Should permission be granted, it is likely that this fishery will take turtles originating from South Carolina.

On a brighter note, "Obey", a large female loggerhead that was released from the Topsail Turtle Hospital in June 2005 was seen nesting on Bald Head Island in late July. Also, four more female loggerheads from Bald Head Island are being tracked this season at www.seaturtle.org/tracking.

Georgia

Mark Dodd with Georgia DNR reports that a total of 1,143 loggerhead nests have been laid in Georgia. In addition, they have recorded four leatherback, two green turtle and one Kemp's ridley nest. This is higher than the previous prediction, but below the 16-year average of approximately 2,000 nests. They also report 169 strandings.

Kris Williams, director of the Caretta Research Project, reported the first documented Kemp's ridley turtle nest in Georgia. Kris happened to be on the beach in the early afternoon and intercepted the turtle as she was beginning to nest. The turtle

deposited 126 eggs including four double eggs. Kris and the volunteers tagged the turtle prior to her return to the sea.

Florida

Allen Foley, State Stranding Coordinator, reports that sea turtle strandings in most of Florida have been average so far during 2005. However, along the west-central coast, they recently had a sharp increase in strandings that are attributed to a chronic red tide event there. For example, from 24 July through 10 August, they received reports of 45 strandings compared with a mean of six strandings.

Dr. Debbie Fauquier, a veterinarian with Mote Marine Lab, has received funding from the marine turtle license plate grants program to study how red tide affects sea turtles.

Many of the sea turtles that are necropsied during red tide events are robust animals with no evidence of trauma. They have found that some of the turtles were last feeding on dead fish, showing that they were likely in the vicinity of a red tide shortly before death. Live turtles rescued during past red tide events have exhibited neurological symptoms associated with exposure to red tide.

South Carolina

As seen in the following table, nesting continues to be strong after a late start. At this rate, the total nesting should be about the same as 2003.

Just as the hatching season was getting under way, a heat wave struck. Temperatures were in the high 90's in the shade! The lethal temperature for loggerhead hatchlings is 94° F. Several beaches reported delayed emergence, high numbers of dead hatchlings in the nests and others had small and weak hatchlings that were unable to make their way to the ocean. Thankfully, the weather has been a bit milder.

Nesting Update

Thru 7/31	2003	2004	2005
Myrtle Beach S. P.	4	2	3
Huntington Beach S. P.	17	9	4
S.C.U.T.E.	88	26	53
South Island*	93	16	115
Cape Island	808	242	787
Lighthouse Island	300	91	218
Deweese Island	13	3	8
Sullivans/Isle of Palms	33	10	53
Folly Beach	54	20	34
Kiawah Island	221	58	136
Seabrook Island	32	4	45
Botany Bay Isl & Plan	268	75	211
Edingsville Beach	59	16	67
Edisto Beach S. P.	85	20	90
Edisto Beach	59	11	70
Harbor Island	44	22	37
Hunting Island	65	18	86
Fripp Island	52	9	39
Pritchards Island	118	28	70
Hilton Head Island	163	67	157
TOTAL	2576	747	2,283

NOTE: South Island 2005 Estimated

Research

Satellite Tracking - Update

Lofton's Lass is like the "Energizer Bunny", she keeps going and going and going. She has now been transmitting for over 770 days with 2,422 locations. She is back in her summer foraging grounds off the coast of New Jersey. You can view this turtle's movements at www.dnr.state.sc.us/seaturtle/.

Notes from the Field

Hilton Head Island

A female loggerhead that nested on 2 June carried tag #RRC727. She had been originally tagged on Wassaw Island, GA, but no other information was available.

On 28 June, a loggerhead bearing tag #RRG274 "false crawled" on Hilton Head

beach. She is missing a right rear flipper and may be the same female that nested a couple of weeks earlier, but failed to cover well and broke about 20 eggs. According to tagging records, this turtle was first tagged on Blackbeard Island, Georgia.

– **Amy Lutmerding**

Cape Island

Staff found a leatherback nest on 14 June. It was moved into the hatchery because of its low location on the beach. There were 87 whole eggs and the usual spacer eggs. – **Sarah Dawsey**

Also, while surveying the beach to "ground truth" our aerial nesting surveys, Tom Murphy

came upon a female loggerhead just making her way back to the sea. He stopped and took a photo and then checked for flipper tags. There was a tag but it was too encrusted to read. After removing it and cleaning off the barnacles, he saw the numbers XXK655. When we looked her up, it was one of the turtles we tagged on Cape Island in 2000 as part of the morphometric study.

When we tagged her in 2000, she was wearing a tag that had been placed on her in 1997 on South Island as part of a translocation study. She is a large (103 cm) beautiful turtle with a clean shell. It was clean in 2000 and still is, as you can see from the photo on page one. It was good to see this "old friend" again.

New Jersey

Another tag return came from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Fish and Wildlife. On 14 June, they captured an adult loggerhead during a bottom trawl survey off their southern coast. It was one of the nesting loggerheads that we tagged in 2000 on Cape Island as part of the morphometric study. If you have been following the satellite telemetry projects on seaturtle.org, you may have noticed that Cape May, the southern tip of New Jersey, is a popular spot for some of these females.

Town of Edisto Beach

Eight of our nests in one area were disturbed during the month of July. It seems that some visitors were curious about what might be in those staked off areas, and they did some digging. We know they found two egg chambers, because they left an egg on top of two different nests. It appears these were weekend visitors, because once Monday came, our nest tampering disappeared.

– **Merelyn Devers**

Folly Beach Nourishment

There have been inquiries as to why Folly Beach is being nourished during the nesting season. Renourishment is usually avoided during this time, but the monies had to be spent by a certain date or be lost. Also the beach was in such bad condition, there was very little usable nesting habitat.

Heroic Group Effort

A loggerhead stranded alive on North Myrtle Beach. A lifeguard cut some line from the turtle and pushed it back into the water. The turtle could still be seen from shore because it was floating. **Jerry Gordon** with the North Myrtle Beach police used jet skis to maneuver the turtle closer to shore where they caught it with a cast net. **DuBose Griffin** transported the turtle to the SC Aquarium. **Jason Crichton** and **Dr. Tom Sheridan** x-rayed the turtle and felt that there was some type of torsion in the gastro-intestinal tract.

DuBose drove the turtle to the NC State Vet School (Raleigh, NC) to be under the care of **Dr. Greg Lewbart** and **Shane Christian**. Under anesthesia, an endoscopic exam uncovered a large hook in the esophagus with line still attached. The hook was removed but the single monofilament line remained. The hook was a large circle hook most likely from commercial long lining.



The hope was that the turtle would be able to pass the line due to its large diameter.



Photos by **DuBose Griffin**

The next day, the turtle was returned to the aquarium, but it died later that afternoon. **Tom Murphy** and DuBose Griffin of SCNDR conducted a post-mortem examination on 6/18/05. All signs indicate a slow chronic mortality due to infection from punctures in esophagus and trachea.

Beach Vitex Update

You read in the last issue of Loggerheadlines that the Town of Folly Beach proposed an ordinance prohibiting further plantings of beach vitex. At their 26 July meeting, the town unanimously approved the ordinance. The ordinance will give the town the right to remove stands of beach vitex even if it is on private property and also if the owner will not do so voluntarily.

There was quite a bit of media coverage by Charleston television stations and newspapers. The SC Beach Vitex Task Force applauds the Town of Folly Beach for this bold step of "zero tolerance" for beach vitex and hopes other beaches will follow suit. For more information please visit <http://www.beachvitex.org/>.

– **Betsy Brabson**

Please note our new web site address:

<http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/seaturtle/>

Please note our new email address for the sea turtle desk: coastbio@dnr.sc.gov

Sally Murphy, *State Coordinator*
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If you have questions or comments, please contact:
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Cover Photo of #XXK655 by **Tom Murphy**.